

Editorial Board

[The Desert Sun](#)

The Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority (CVA) knows the trick: Promotion pays off for the travel industry.

It looks like the federal government has caught on, too.

The U.S. Senate last week gave final approval to the Travel Promotion Act. It would charge \$10 for international visitors from the 35 "visa waiver countries," where residents don't have to pay a \$131 visa fee.

The fee will create a fund to educate them about U.S. security and entry regulations. The aim is to make the restrictions feel less daunting and to promote tourism in the United States.

The theory is, like the transient occupancy tax that supports the CVA, foreign visitors will barely notice an extra 10 bucks to come to this country. No tax dollars will be spent.

Oxford Economics, a consulting firm, estimates the program would generate \$321 million in new federal tax revenue each year.

For the Coachella Valley, travel is a \$1 billion-a-year industry. For the United States, according to the bill's summary, travel generates \$1.3 trillion in economic activity and supports 8.3 million travel-related jobs. About 12 percent of Americans are employed by the travel industry.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, travel to the U.S. has declined 17 percent since 9/11. Further declines are attributed to the recession.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, a Democrat from Rancho Mirage, and Rep. Mary Bono Mack, a

Republican from Palm Springs, both praised the measure.

"Our region has established itself as a world-renowned resort destination, and by better coordinating our travel promotion efforts to the rest of the world, we can see local benefits for our businesses and our community," said Bono Mack, one of the main House sponsors.

"This legislation will create thousands of jobs in California and across the country by promoting our country as a destination for international visitors," said Boxer. "The bill will not only spur economic growth, it will reduce the deficit by \$425 million over a decade."

Another bill could also help tourist destinations like Palm Springs. The Protecting Resort Destinations from Discrimination Act would prohibit any U.S. agency from implementing a policy that would discourage conventions in areas perceived to be a resort or vacation destination.

The bill is sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat from Nevada who is trying to help Las Vegas and other resort destinations in his state.

Bono Mack supports the bill, too.

"We've built up an image as a great resort town and, in this case, we may be victims of our own success," she said.

Starting in 2006, Bush administration memos called for federal employees to get special approval for meetings in "locations known for gambling."

Rep. Harry Mitchell, a Democrat from Arizona and one of the bill's original sponsors, said it's wrong to discriminate against a place just because it happens to be a nice resort area.

"Just get the best value for your dollar," he said.

CVA spokesman Mark Graves said bargain prices help companies justify conferences in resort towns.

The travel industry is important to the United States and in particular to the Coachella Valley. The Desert Sun applauds the passage of the Travel Promotion Act and encourages the passage of the Protecting Resort Destinations from Discrimination Act.